

Lente (F. D.)

# TREATMENT OF VOMITING

BY

# ELECTRICITY.

*Box 10.*

BY

FREDERICK D. LENTE, M.D.,

OF COLD SPRING.

MEMBER OF THE "BOARD OF MANAGERS OF HUDSON RIVER STATE HOSPITAL,"  
OF NEW-YORK NEUROLOGICAL SOCIETY, ETC.

(Reprinted from Dr. Beard's "Archives of Electrology and Neurology" for November, 1874.)

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The second number of the first volume, for November, 1874, is now ready, with the following

**TABLE OF CONTENTS.**

- I. Disorders of Nutrition and Displacements of the Womb, and their Treatment by Faradization. By Dr. A. Tripier, of Paris.
- II. The Elements of Electro-Therapeutics. A Series of Letters addressed to Inquiring Practitioners. By George M. Beard, M.D.
- III. The Effects of Lightning-Stroke on the Nervous System. By Byron W. Munson, M.D., of Amity, Ct.
- IV. Cases of Hydrocele. Recovery under Electrolytic and Galvano-Caustic Treatment. By T. F. Frank, M.D., Titusville, Pa.
- V. Municipal Law, and its Relations to the Constitution of Man. By R. S. Guernsey, Counselor-at-Law, New-York City.
- VI. The Influence of the Climate of Colorado on the Nervous System. By Charles Denison, M.D., Denver, Col.
- VII. On the Treatment of Vomiting by Electricity. By Frederick D. Lente, M.D., of Cold Spring. Member of the Council of the New-York Neurological Society.
- VIII. Description of a Portable Medical Battery devised by Prof. George W. Rains, M.D., of the Medical Department of the University of Georgia.
- IX. Galvanism in Ocular and Aural Affections. By W. W. Seely, M.D., Cincinnati.
- X. Chronic Alcoholism. By George M. Beard, M.D.
- XI. The Relations of the Nervous System to Diseases of the Skin. By L. Duncan Bulkley, A.M., M.D., New-York.

**MISCELLANEOUS EDITORIAL NOTES :**

The Duty of Vivisection—Camp-Life for the Nervous—Additions to the Cod-Liver Oil Emulsion—Cold Powder—Iodoform in Nervous Diseases—Hay Fever Researches—“Mind Reading”—The Nervous System and Skin-Diseases—in Memoriam of Prof. Jeffries Wyman and Dr. Anstie.

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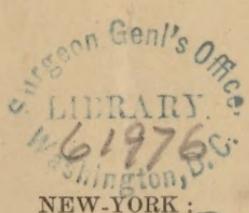
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## TREATMENT OF VOMITING BY ELECTRICITY.

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VOMITING is one of the most troublesome, and often intractable, symptoms which we encounter in the management of disease; not seldom a direct, and frequently an indirect cause of death. Among children, its management is particularly annoying and perplexing, their delicate stomachs often rejecting obstinately both food and nourishment, setting at defiance our most reliable remedies, and rendering futile our best-directed efforts. Sometimes it may fairly be considered a disease of itself, as in sea-sickness; sometimes it converts a physiological process, as pregnancy, into a pathological one of the gravest character. Sea-sickness alone, though generally considered only a temporary annoyance, is rendering miserable the lives of thousands of travelers at all times. But it is sometimes the indirect cause of death, and now and then a case occurs in which we may fairly attribute the fatal result to the direct influence of this malady. My colleague at the Hudson River State Hospital, Dr. Kellogg, informs me that he saw a relative die from it on board ship; and a relative of mine would have died, in all probability, had he not been on his father's vessel, which made for the nearest port on the coast, and put him ashore.

Any remedy, then, which claims to be more effective than all others against so serious and intractable a complication, whether it be the result of actual disease of the stomach itself, or from irritation of the pneumogastric nerve, or from ordinary reflex action, as when it occurs in pregnancy, uterine inflammation,

etc., must challenge the attention and interest of every member of the profession, whether his investigations and practice lie in the direction of the nervous system or not. Such a remedy I believe to exist\* in *electricity*; and, without waiting to accumulate a large number of cases, in order to establish conclusively the grounds of my belief, I offer a sufficient number to enlist the interest and co-operation of my professional friends in the further prosecution of the study of this particular application of a remedy which is so rapidly gaining popularity in the profession.

Other experiments may have been previously made in this direction. If they have, the profession generally are in ignorance of them. Drs. Beard and Rockwell are the only writers, so far as I am aware, who allude to this subject, and they seem to place no reliance on it, never having tried it themselves. They allude, in their excellent treatise, to the experiments of a French physician, who applied *atropia* to the epigastrium, and then the electrode of a battery, merely to facilitate the absorption, with the alleged effect of relieving the nausea; which relief was probably entirely due to the electricity.

In a letter just received from Dr. Beard, he informs me that, so far as he knows, there is nothing published on the subject, except the reference in his book. In the next edition, just about to appear, he alludes to my experiments. The only item which has ever attracted my attention is a very short paragraph in the *Richmond and Louisville Journal*, several years ago, with no signature, merely stating that, if electricity (the *kind* or mode of application not stated) be applied to the epigastrium, it is *impossible* for the patient to vomit. This anonymous and unauthenticated statement may prove to be, with very few exceptions, correct. A reporter of Bellevue Hospital practice, not connected with the institution, recently made the statement that the obstinate vomiting of puerperal fever had been successfully treated there by electricity. Dr. Young, then one of the resident physicians, informs me that he thinks it was only tried in two cases, and at his suggestion, after witnessing its marked effects in some of my cases, while assisting me, some months ago.

With these introductory remarks, I give you, Mr. Editor, the

promised cases in as few words as is consistent with their full appreciation :

*Case 1.*—This case was the first in which I tried electricity for the relief of obstinate vomiting, and has already been before the medical public (*N. Y. Medical Journal*, March, 1874) as an illustration of the effect of repeated hypodermic injections of quinine.

I was called to her, December 9th, 1873, by Dr. Murdock, because, having exhausted all his resources for her relief, he considered her case desperate. Had been confined two months before (Dr. Farrington, of Bellevue Hospital, in attendance), had lost a large amount of blood both before and after delivery, and was much prostrated, never having enjoyed good health. She subsequently had a succession of mammary abscesses, by which her strength was still further reduced. At the same time she was suffering from malaria, which eventually developed into a virulent and obstinate attack of intermittent fever, of which one of the most prominent symptoms was obstinate vomiting, with a watery diarrhoea, efforts at vomiting being always attended by a discharge from the bowels. On this account, nutrition could neither be effected by mouth nor rectum. The most careful and skillful attention to food, as to quantity, quality, and interval, on the part of her physician, with an equally judicious selection of all the known remedies, including small and repeated doses of iced champagne by means of the siphon tube, failed to afford more than temporary relief; and, for twelve hours previous to my visit, she had been unable to retain a tea-spoonful of ice-water on the stomach for three minutes, and had attempted nothing else. Her pulse was 125, extremely soft and feeble. Temperature in mouth, 104°. As a forlorn hope, I recommended the application of the induced current of an ordinary electro-magnetic battery. With a wet electrode over the spine (*semilunar ganglion*), I used my hand as the other electrode over the epigastrium, with a wet folded napkin interposed, and used a very mild current, owing to her extreme weakness. After the lapse of fifteen minutes, I requested Dr. M. to give her three ounces of a mixture of equal parts of lime-water and milk, which she had abandoned days before as worse than useless. Within two or three minutes, she

called for a vessel, and said she must vomit, although implored to lie still and resist the effort. She made several violent but ineffectual efforts, and finally fell back exhausted; all the while my hand, conveying a stronger and stronger current, was kept steadily applied to the epigastrium. One electrode was now carried from the spine below to the seventh cervical vertebra, and the current was continued for thirteen minutes longer, at the end of which time, as there was no nausea, it was discontinued.

*Afternoon.*—Same day. Patient has neither had nausea nor diarrhoea, although she has taken regulated doses of beef-tea and brandy, both by mouth and rectum. Dr. M. applied the electricity at noon, as a precautionary measure.

*December 11th.*—Two days after. No return of nausea or diarrhoea. Dr. M. applied the current in the evening on the 9th, and not since.

*December 13th.*—Doing well. Increasing nourishment, and relishing it. Bowels constipated since the application.

*December 18th.*—Patient has been so well that the usual prophylactic hypodermic dose of quinine was omitted, and to-day she has *malaise*, fever, and *vomiting*. Dr. M. gave a large hypodermic injection of quinine, and applied the current as before, with equally prompt relief.

*December 25th.*—No recurrence of nausea, although the malarious trouble continues. She can now even retain the quinine on the stomach. She subsequently recovered her health entirely, and never vomited again.

*Case 2.*—This case also appears in the article above referred to, and is one of great interest, without reference to the symptom for the consideration of which it is again introduced to the profession.

I am indebted to Dr. Murdock, with whom I saw the case in consultation, for the following notes. I will preface them by the statement that she had been kept alive for months only by the most assiduous attention on the part of her physician and friends; sometimes subsisting for days only on iced champagne and small doses of brandy, neither the stomach nor rectum being able to retain any other nutriment.

*December 10th, 1873.*—Has had more than usual nausea

lately, so as only occasionally to be able to retain even a tablespoonful or two of lime-water and milk. To-day, from the great success of faradization in the case of Mrs. C., I used it for twenty minutes, with wet electrodes, from the seventh cervical vertebra to the epigastrium. She felt better after the lapse of a few minutes, and I gave her half a tea-cupful of lime-water and milk, which she retained with ease. I left her quite free from nausea.

*December 11th.*—Stomach has felt better, since yesterday, than for many days before. Has retained every thing. Repeat electricity. From this date, faradization was repeated three times a week, and she had no return of vomiting whatever until ten (10) weeks later, when it occurred in the course of a sudden and fatal peritonitis. She had passed through two menstrual periods, in the mean time, without vomiting, which had not occurred before for two years. Her diarrhoea was also checked.

On December 29th she had an attack of malarial fever, and passed through it without vomiting, which she had never done before. On January 5th she took, by mistake, from fifteen to twenty grains of powdered alum, and did not vomit it.

*Case 3. Vomiting and other serious Symptoms complicating Menstruation.*—Mrs. C. B., 43. Has suffered from uterine disease and disordered menstruation for many years, but very much relieved for the last five years. For some months has suffered from pain over a small spot just to the left of the lower dorsal region of the spine. Her catamenia now due. Last night, January 2d, 1874, was attacked by nausea and retching, and pain in epigastrium, extending upwards under the sternum, and severe dizziness. The nausea was succeeded by vomiting of frothy mucus, and, for some hours before I saw her, she was blind for a portion of the time. She was in bed, with the head low, pulse feeble and slow, countenance anxious. Applied the interrupted (faradic) current, one electrode (wet) to the middle dorsal region, and my hand conveying the current from the other to the epigastrium, with a wet folded handkerchief interposed. Within ten minutes she was much relieved; no nausea, pain almost gone, and vision much better. The hand was then placed on the painful spot in the side, and the pain was

promptly relieved. It was changed to the vertex. Here she could only endure the weakest current. The head-symptoms were much mitigated, but some dizziness continued. *Séance* lasted twenty minutes.

*January 4th.*—Much better. No head-symptoms, no nausea. The nausea did not recur, although she had a recurrence of severe pain, and other symptoms, for some days, connected with suppression, and only relieved when the latter was relieved by the application of the *galvanic* current to the *cervix uteri*.

*Case 4.*—Mrs. M. P., a very delicate woman, aged 30, the subject of severe chronic bronchitis, and nursing a baby; sent for me in a great hurry, March 29th, 1874, with the message that she was “all stuffed up, and could not breathe or lie down.” Found, on visiting her, that the difficulties were caused by *myalgia* of the left side of chest and left shoulder. Had been blistered and burnt by sinapisms with no relief. The faradic current relieved her entirely in fifteen minutes. For weeks she has been suffering constantly from nausea; to remedy this I applied the current to the epigastrium and over the solar plexus for a few minutes. This single application relieved her nausea entirely, although the recurrence of the pain required a reapplication of the battery to the affected parts.

*Case 5.*—A. D. This is a case of pyonephrosis in a young girl who had, on March 13th, 1874, been reduced almost to a hopeless state of debility, with malarious fever superadded to her serious organic disease. The two had, for some time previous to this date, induced such a degree of nausea and disgust for food, that, in spite of medicines and variations of food innumerable, and change of air, could only be mitigated for short intervals. Her pulse was 130, and very feeble. She has also an obstinate diarrhoea, for which she is using opium suppositories daily. (In her case opium does not affect the stomach.) Her urinary secretion has also diminished lately. To-day, passed the faradic current from the *solar plexus* (wet electrode) to the epigastrium, applying the current to the latter with my hand, a wet cloth interposed; then passing the hand over the tumor and all painful parts of the abdomen, and over the unaffected kidney, to stimulate increased action.

*March 14th.*—Much better. Has retained all her food; only once, when she took some tea, did she vomit, and the nausea did not continue. Pains almost entirely relieved. Has had the first natural passage from the bowels for some weeks. Repeat electricity.

*March 17th.*—Nausea entirely relieved. Feels better, and actually relishes her food a little. Bowels in a natural condition without any opium. Electricity applied daily. Sleeps much better. From this date her condition improved in every way, and the electricity was discontinued.

*Case 6.*—Mrs. K., 63, bilious colic and sick headache.

Patient has suffered for several years with periodical visitations of this character, and has usually been relieved by hypodermic injections of morphia. Called to her April 2d, 1874. Attacked at bed-time, last night, after drinking a glass of cold water, with epigastric pain. Mustard was applied with some relief. Towards morning, the pain increased, and she could not lie down; the pain extended to back and shoulders, and she commenced vomiting, getting rid of food taken the evening before. Various remedies, including opiates, were tried in vain, as she could retain nothing on her stomach. She now retches constantly, and the epigastric pain and headache are intense. Pulse slow and feeble. Applied the faradic current, one sponge over the solar plexus and one over the epigastrium. Bore the full power of a Kidder battery without feeling any uneasy sensation. *Almost immediately* she breathed easier, and appeared somewhat relieved. In four minutes she was decidedly better. But she complained of the headache, and vomited a bitter yellowish fluid *while the current was passing*. I now changed one electrode to the seventh cervical vertebra, retaining the other over the epigastrium. Very soon the nausea subsided, the headache was much relieved, and *within ten minutes all uneasy sensations* had vanished. I left her as well as before the occurrence of the attack, except debility. She never recovers permanently from these attacks in less than three days; accordingly, there was a recurrence of the symptoms the succeeding day and the day after, each attack controlled by the usual hypodermic injection, because neither I nor my assistant had time to employ electricity.

*Case 7.*—Mrs. L. P., 28. This was a case of malarious vomiting; the symptoms, with the exception of this, had been relieved by the hypodermic injection of quinine. The vomiting and retching were very distressing, and had resisted various anti-emetic remedies. With Gaiffe's small battery applied the faradic current from solar plexus to epigastrum for twenty-five minutes. The next day, June 29th, 1874, there was no recurrence of the nausea, although she was jaundiced, constipated, and had irregular chills.

*Case 8.*—This was a little boy of six years, to whom I was called in August, 1874, for a violent attack of vomiting and purging connected with a malarious attack. The fever and purging were controlled with but little difficulty, but the vomiting resisted all the usual remedies, and the greatest care in regulating his food, which it was difficult to get him to take. Finally, I applied the faradic current from the lower dorsal region (solar plexus) to the epigastrum, using my hand, as usual in delicate subjects. After fifteen minutes I gave an ounce of lime-water and milk as a test. He retained it, although previously not able to retain a tea-spoonful. The next day he had only vomited once, although a violent attack of fever has supervened. Is taking a moderate and regulated amount of nourishment. Had no recurrence of the vomiting, and made a good recovery.

*Case 9.*—This was a baby, nine months old; had been suffering for several weeks with summer complaint, of which vomiting was a troublesome complication. In the absence of his medical attendant I was called in. He could retain neither food nor medicine in the smallest doses. Applied the faradic current for sixteen minutes from the back to the epigastrum. Was obliged to use my hand, and only the feeblest current, on account of the struggles of the child. The day following there had been no nausea, and all food and medicine had been retained.

*Case 10.*—This was a case of vomiting in a feeble woman aged 42, complicating chronic Morbus Brightii, under the care of Dr. Murdock, to whom I am indebted for the following notes.

*March 24th, 1874.*—Among other troublesome complications are extreme nausea and persistent vomiting, so as very

nearly to preclude all food or medicine for some days past. To-day used the faradie current for twenty-five minutes with complete relief. Gave a half cupful of milk-punch while the current was passing, which she retained without difficulty.

*April 13th.*—Only once has the vomiting recurred, and then from imprudence in eating; a *séance* of thirty minutes relieved her.

*Case 11.*—Dr. Murdock's case and notes. Mrs. P. "Intense nausea and vomiting from the combined effects of severe *migraine* and the hypodermic injection of morphia. Applied the full strength of a Kidder's battery. Patient could not feel the current at first, and the nausea seemed to be increased. She soon began to feel the current, and then grew easier. Within twenty minutes the symptoms were relieved." Subsequently this patient had the application, under precisely similar circumstances, on several occasions, sometimes with as prompt relief, sometimes with only partial relief. (L.)

*Case 12.*—Vomiting, apparently from the effects of an opiate. Case reported by Dr. Murdock. Mary F., 6 years, attacked last evening, March 30th, 1874, with violent and long-continued convulsions. Relieved by opiates and the inhalation of chloroform. Is suffering to-day from intense nausea, which has not yielded at all to the ordinary remedies. I then tried faradization. She was restless, so that I could only give a weak current for twenty minutes. This completely relieved her nausea, and she drank cold water freely and retained it.

*March 31st.*—I learn that she vomited once soon after the electricity was discontinued, and once afterward during the night, but none since, and she is much better.

*Case 13.*—Reported by Dr. Murdock. A lady, aged 65, long afflicted by dyspepsia and other ailments, attacked April 5th, 1874, with severe pain in epigastrium and vomiting, which did not yield at all to ordinary remedies. Pulse only 36. For the relief of the pain and vomiting also, I tried the faradic current of a moderately powerful battery for half an hour; but she could only feel the current slightly at times. Vomited several times while the current was passing, but only when she could not feel it at all. Pain and vomiting subsequently yielded to the hypodermic injection of morphia.

*Case 14.*—I was called to this patient, a very feeble woman, March 30th, 1874. She was suffering from the most intense supraorbital neuralgia, attended by violent vomiting and continuous nausea. Gave a hypodermic injection of morphia and atropia, and applied the faradic current to the back and epigastrium as usual. The nausea appeared to be relieved in five minutes. Continued the application fifteen minutes, and repeated the injection. Returned an hour after and found that the pain was relieved, but the nausea had returned. Did not repeat the electricity.

*Case 15.*—Mrs. I. K., an extremely feeble woman, has always suffered very much, during her pregnancies, from nausea, dyspepsia, and vomiting throughout the last six months, and attended by *quasi* labor pains, which, during the last two pregnancies, required the almost daily use of McMunn's elixir of opium, the only preparation she could take. It has been considered very problematical by several physicians who have watched her case for some years, and by me also, whether she could go through another pregnancy safely. I had warned her, in case of conception, to call me as soon as her bad symptoms should occur, and not to use any opiate, as I had determined to try the effect of electricity unaided by any other remedy. To-day, March 26th, 1874, she informs me that she is *enceinte* three months. Has been away from home, for change of air, and comes back with the nausea, vomiting, neuralgic pains in head, neck, etc., to which she has before been a martyr. She is now suffering from aggravated dyspeptic symptoms, vomiting all solid food taken; feels so much exhausted that she keeps her bed-room upstairs, and can not get down. Applied the faradic current for twenty minutes from nape to epigastrium.

*March 27th.*—Much better; down stairs and about the house for a couple of hours. Took a good meal, and has retained it. Repeat application.

*March 29th.*—Still improving. Retains all her food, and has increased the quantity.

*April 8th.*—The application has been repeated daily, and with excellent effect. For two or three days past, however, she has not felt the decidedly tonic effect which she at first experienced, and has some oppression at epigastrium after meals,

and can not lie down for an hour or two. To-day commenced "general electrization" (faradic current) for twenty minutes.

*April 9th.*—Much better; could lie down and sleep immediately after meal yesterday. Has eaten more to-day than usual, and has felt no inconvenience from it.

*April 19th.*—The application was continued, at first, every day; now every second day. Much stronger, no indigestion to speak of. The electricity was continued in this manner for two months, and patient went through her pregnancy and confinement without difficulty.

*Case 16.*—W. H. L., 48. *Sept. 30th, 1874.*—Called to patient to-day, and find that he has been suffering from ill-health for some two or three weeks. Has now fever of the typho-malarial type, attended by intense headache, nausea, and vomiting. Has not been able to keep any food on the stomach. Applied the induced current from a Gaiffe battery from the nape to epigastrium, and from the lower dorsal region of spine; whole *séance* twenty minutes. Felt the good effect on head and stomach within five minutes. Drank part of a tumblerful of milk, and would have taken more if allowed.

*Oct. 1st.*—Has vomited but twice, although he has taken his nourishment regularly, and notwithstanding an increase in his fever. Has no nausea. Repeat application fifteen minutes.

*Oct. 3d.*—Took some cathartic pills soon after the last application, and some hours after the vomiting recurred, and continued until his bowels were moved by a dose of Epsom salts, since which the nausea has subsided. His temp. is  $105\frac{1}{2}$ °.

*Oct. 5th.*—Dr. J. C. Young, of Bellevue Hospital, saw the case to-day, and reports his temp.  $106\frac{1}{2}$ °, and that his stomach retains every thing he takes, and he has no nausea.

*Case 17.*—R. T., 32. Has had almost constant fever, Oct. 2d, 1874, of the regular intermittent type for some days. Dr. Murdock yesterday gave a hypodermic injection of morphia for relief of violent headache, and large doses of quinine. He has now no fever or headache, but when he sits up he has vertigo, and when he stands, this increases, and he invariably vomits. Applied the induced current from the nape to the epigastrium for fourteen minutes. Within four minutes he felt his head "decidedly stronger," as he expressed it; and, at the

end of the *séance*, could walk about with no inconvenience whatever, except a feeling of weakness.

*Case 18.*—Miss S. S., 35. *July 3d, 1874.*—Has been laboring under intermittent fever of an irregular and obstinate type for some days; the prominent and most painful symptoms being headache, nausea, and vomiting. I have tried various remedies for vomiting, with but slight relief. Applied, today, the induced current of a Gaiffe battery from the nape to the epigastrium, and from the lower dorsal region (solar plexus). The nausea was rather increased than relieved after a *séance* of twenty-five minutes.

*Sept. 27th.*—Ever since last date patient has kept her bed almost all the time, and has been an almost constant sufferer from nausea and vomiting; has had an irregular form of fever most of the time, and taken various remedies for its relief. Has also more or less neuralgia. By the aid of anti-emetic remedies, and iced champagne in small and frequently repeated doses, she has managed to keep a little nourishment on her stomach; but her strength is much reduced. After the unsuccessful essay with electricity, I did not repeat it until yesterday, when, failing with every thing else, I gave it a second trial, and with a more satisfactory result. A *séance* of twenty minutes, part of the time from the nape and part from the lower dorsal region. She drank beef-tea and retained it, and has continued to do so. Repeated the application for fifteen minutes.

*Oct. 5th.*—Is sitting up, and has had no recurrence of nausea and no fever. Takes eucalyptol for the latter with good effect. Is gaining her strength.

*Case 19.*—Mrs. F. L., 43. In good health, while menstruating, was attacked last night with intense nausea and vomiting without any obvious cause, also with one loose and copious alvine dejection. Tried various remedies, external and internal, with no relief. I gave a goblet of warm water, hoping to rid the stomach of undigested food. But, although it produced a thorough evacuation of its contents, the nausea and vomiting continued. I then applied the induced current for twenty-five minutes from the nape to the stomach and from the solar plexus; also on the top of the sternum, where she complained of "a lump." She did not feel relieved, materially, of the

nausea, but the vomiting did not recur, and she feels well this morning.

These are not *selected* cases, but comprise *all* in which I have made use of electricity for the relief of nausea and vomiting.

I have not had occasion to use the remedy for sea-sickness myself, but have no doubt of its efficacy, and have advised numerous persons to try it. I have not heard of the result, except in one case ; and, as the patient has not yet returned from Europe, I can not give a very satisfactory report. But I learn, indirectly, that the lady who tried it, and who always suffers terribly from the slightest motion of a ship, and even from that of an open boat on the river, was completely relieved. I feel confident that this will prove to be our most valuable resource in cases of sea-sickness ; also in the vomiting which frequently follows anaesthesia, and which is not only distressing and prostrating, but which endangers the success of the most skillfully performed operations on the eye. I have, of late, been so successful in the prophylactic treatment of this form of vomiting, that I have not had an opportunity to try the effect of electricity. This consists in giving from 20 to 30 grs. of bromide of potassium three times a day for two or three days previous to that on which the operation is performed. I have also tried this in one case of expected sea-sickness, and apparently with good results.



GLEANINGS FROM OTHER JOURNALS :

Dr. Väter on General Electrization and Central Galvanization, etc., etc.—Reviews of Hitzig, Lincoln, Buzzard, Clymer, etc.

The next number, for May, 1875, will contain an article on *Hysterical Symptoms in Organic Nervous Affections*; a case of *Stricture of the Oesophagus treated by Electricity*; a paper on *Hallucinations*, and one on *Muscular Reactions in Paralysis*; Remarks on the Psychological Lessons of the Beecher Case; the Phenomena of Trance, etc., etc.

The ablest living authorities in the various branches of Electrology and Neurology in America and Europe are already engaged to contribute to this Journal.

The first number, for May, 1874, contains sixteen original articles, by Althaus, of London; Benedikt, of Vienna; Tripier, of Paris, and a number of well-known writers in America.

Books for review, and manuscripts, may be sent to the editor,

GEO. M. BEARD, M.D.,

53 WEST 33d STREET, NEW-YORK.

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107 East 28th Street, New-York.

THE ARCHIVES will hereafter appear in the latter part of the months of May and November.

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NOTICES OF THE PRESS.

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## CONTENTS FOR MAY, 1874.

---

### ORIGINAL COMMUNICATIONS:

	PAGES
I. Electrolysis and Croton Chloral. By Julius Althaus, M.D., of London,	1—4
II. A Case of Complete Paralysis of one Recurrent Laryngeal Nerve. By F. I. Knight, M.D., of Boston,	4—10
III. Cataleptiform Paraplegia. By Professor Moritz Benedikt, M.D., of Vienna,	10—12
IV. The Nature of Electricity. By Professor Henry T. Eddy, of Princeton College,	12—18
V. Electrolysis in the Treatment of Strictures of the Urethra. By Robert Newman, M.D., of New-York,	18—49
VI. A Case of Hysterical Hemiplegia. By Professor J. L. Cabell, M.D., University of Virginia,	49—54
VII. Tinnitus Annum treated by the Galvanic Current. By Thomas F. Rumbold, M.D., of St. Louis,	54—58
VIII. Medical Jurisprudence and the Medico-Legal Society of New-York. By Clark Bell, Esq., of New-York,	58—61
IX. Hysteria and Spinal Irritation treated by Central Galvanization. By W. F. Hutchinson, M.D., of Providence, R. I.,	61—64
X. Some Recent Investigations into the Functions of the Human Brain. By Professor Roberts Bartholow, M.D., of Cincinnati,	68—78
XI. A New Method of Treating Malignant Tumors by Electrolyzing the Base. By George M. Beard, M.D., of New-York,	74—89
XII. Experimental Researches in the Physiology of the Brain. By George M. Beard, M.D.,	89—98
XIII. Case of Scirrus of the Rectum treated by Electrolysis, with Remarks. By Professor A. B. Crosby, M.D., of New-York,	98—103
XIV. The Cabinet Battery. By George M. Beard, M.D.,	103—108
XV. Complete Hemiplegia followed by Rapid Recovery—Probable Embolus. By Professor Samuel G. Armor, M.D., of Brooklyn,	108—109
XVI. Faradic Anæsthesia. By Dr. A. Tripier, of Paris,	109—115

### MISCELLANEOUS NOTES:

New-York Society of Neurology and Electrology—New-York Neurological Society—Chromated Lead as an Electro-negative Element—Latest Modification of Cod-Liver Oil Emulsion—Tickets to American Medical Association,	116—123
--	---------

### GLEANINGS FROM FOREIGN JOURNALS:

Hitzig, Further Observations on the Physiology of the Brain—Carville, Duret, and Dupuy, On the Physiology of the Brain—Hitzig, Electrical Irritation of the Brain of a Monkey—Gerhardt, Icterus Catarrhalis treated by Faradization of the Gall-Bladder—Bruns, Electrolytic Treatment of Naso-pharyngeal Polypus—Leidesdorf, A Case of Saturnine Epilepsy and Mania—Gustman, On the Action of some New Remedies—Kohls, The Influence of Fright on the Origin of Disease—Schippel, A Case of Universal Anæsthesia—Meyer, Reduction of Glandular Tumors by Electricity—Beard, The Treatment of Insanity by Electricity,	124—134
---	---------

### NOTICES OF BOOKS:

Althaus, On Medical Electricity—Byrne, On Electro-Cautery in Uterine Surgery—Arthius, On Statical Electricity—Chicago Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease—The Sunitarian—American Journal of Insanity—Tripier, Monographs,	135—140
--	---------

EDITORIAL,	141—143
------------	---------